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The remains of Milecastle 39 on Hadrian's Wall, near Steel Rigg.

My Favourite History Place

The edge of empire: Hadrian's Wall – Sue Temple

Choosing Hadrian's Wall as one of my favourite places is a bit of a cheat, really, as it is a 73-mile-long (80 Roman miles) wall punctuated with a whole range of 20 individual sites each worth a visit; from mile castles and forts to desolate sections with fabulous views or Roman settlements which are now busy market towns. The wall stretches from Wallsend (Segedunum) at the mouth of the Tyne in the east to Bowness-on-Solway (Maia) in north Cumbria in the west.

I have lived all my life within about 50 miles of the wall as I was born in Cumbria then moved to the north east to attend university and went on to teach there for several years before returning to Cumbria 12 years ago. I have visited all through my life – as a pupil on school trips, then taking pupils there myself and now I take trainee teachers there. Every time you visit is a different experience as the weather and who you are with has such an impact.

Initially the Romans marched further north into what is now Scotland, but gradually they retreated, eventually holding their position at the line of

the wall. The Emperor Hadrian ordered the building of the wall in AD121-122 and different legions built separate sections over the following eight years – not necessarily neighbouring sections either. There are various theories about why the wall was built: to keep the soldiers occupied on what was quite a boring posting; to keep out the Celts; or to control and monitor the movement of traders between the areas – probably collecting taxes from those who did so. Traders, civilians and soldiers would all have travelled through the wall boundaries so this could have been quite lucrative and could explain why the wall was built as a military stronghold.

The wall itself was built about 4 metres high and 3 metres wide. It was further defended by ditches and at every Roman mile there was a mile castle with a tower to guard the crossing points. There was a string of larger forts (Chesters, Housesteads etc.) along the wall where the soldiers actually lived but they patrolled along the whole length of

The remains of the Roman Fort at Housesteads on Hadrian's Wall.



the boundary.

Serving on Hadrian's Wall must have been cold, wet and boring for the auxiliary soldiers. These included soldiers from all over the Roman Empire: Gaul, Holland, Germany, North Africa, Iraq and the Middle East among others. When they weren't building and digging soldiers had marches, weapons training or drill on the parade grounds within the forts. In their spare time there is evidence they hunted, gambled, drank wine or beer or wrote letters home. Soldiers could also visit the

bath-houses which were usually included in the fort complexes. There is a surviving example of one of these at Chesters and a reconstructed bath-house at Segedunum.

We know a great deal about life on the wall thanks to the archaeological digs which have taken place over the years, especially at Vindolanda where digs take place each summer. A whole range of artefacts has been recovered including numerous sandals and shoes (421 excavated in 2016 alone!), weapons, pottery, leather, jewellery, coins, horses' harnesses and other decorative pieces. The shoe hoard represents at least one for every person who was living in the fort at the time and includes baby shoes right up to sandals worn by the soldiers. It gives a unique perspective on fashions and affluence in AD212. Many documents (accounts books, requests for leave, even a birthday invitation) have also survived and were also excavated at the fort. The 'Vindolanda tablets', which are actually very thin pieces of wood about the size of a postcard, are now on display in the British Museum because of their importance; they include the only example of a female's handwriting from this period. Vindolanda was not on the actual wall but slightly to the south. A fort was established here well before the wall was built in the mid AD70s and it was probably used as a base during the building of the actual wall.

Housesteads, situated about half-way along the Wall, is the most complete example of a typical fort in Britain and has been excavated enough for visitors to be able to identify the various buildings. These include the commanding officer's quarters, a hospital, granaries and barracks. In addition to the soldiers, lots of administration staff, craftsmen, doctors and medical orderlies, stable hands, priests, clerks and messengers would have been based here. There is also evidence of the village which grew up outside the fort. Many soldiers kept their wives and families here though for legionary soldiers this wasn't strictly allowed. Villages contained take-away stalls and inns. There might be tailors, jewellery-makers and scribes producing work for the soldiers to buy. Few soldiers would be able to read and write so the scribes would write messages to their families back home.

Sue Temple is a member of the HA Primary Committee and is a senior lecturer at the University of Cumbria.











If you would like to tell us about your history place in a future edition of *The Historian*, in about 700 words, please email: alf.wilkinson@history.org.uk

Drinks of empire in ten tweets

Empires provide a variety of legacies that can exist long after the empire. The most common way that empires hang around is in the use of words and language. Terms and words once specific to a place and culture can be adopted and transformed. Many people use them while being oblivious to their origin. As well as in language, evidence of empires and international trade can be found in food and drinks, with names or ingredients a reminder of a different time or influence. So in this edition the ten tweets are on the drinks spread or influenced by Empires – can you guess the name of each?



Answers:
Gin and tonic, Tea, Whiskey sour,
Singapore Sling, Coffee, Martini, Rum,
Madeira, Hot Chocolate, Wine.

- | | |
|---|---|
|  | Bark from the cinchona tree made a medicine to stop sickness and death in a hot climate and gave dignity to mother's ruin. |
|  | Whether it's from China or India now is of little importance compared to its impact on British society, customs and meal times! |
|  | It may have been invented in the New World but its ingredients have their roots in the Old one which didn't sour its popularity. |
|  | As famous as the hotel it was invented in, this cocktail from South East Asia brings European cherry brandy together with fresh juices. |
|  | It started in Ethiopia before the Arab world seized it and made it theirs. The British took it to Boston and the rest is history. |
|  | How you mix the liquor from Italy, Britain and or Eastern Europe is up for debate with everyone from Coward to Fleming having a view. |
|  | The British Navy used to run on it, Hemingway would have remained sober without it (possibly) and Cubans love it! |
|  | If you were on your way to the East Indies a stop at this island would fortify you. A drink from here goes nicely with a slice of cake. |
|  | 2000 years ago the Mayans drank it, then the Spanish brought it to Europe, now no winter fair or marshmallow wld be the same without it |
|  | Red, white or rosé – the Greeks celebrated it, the Romans tried to make it in the UK, but the Brits preferred to import it until recently |

Summarising an event or person using ten statements of only 140 characters (including spaces!). Compiled by Paula Kitching

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